Title: "*Deeper within darkness*": Ted Hughes and the Crisis in Human Civilisation

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Synopsis

Ted Hughes's poems exhibit a world inhabited by creatures who are devoid of the so-called sophistication as claimed by the modern human beings. This world is still undisturbed by the rationalistic impulses, wavering, vacillations, disinterestedness and disillusionments of the post war society. The end of the Second World War was solace to the nations but it witnessed the devastation of the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The nations existed with the fear of being wiped out any moment. Ted Hughes, who was a mere child then, gathered much impressions about the destructive and horrible roles of the warring nations from his father, William Hughes who fought in the First World War. Listening to these accounts from early childhood, it was quite natural for Ted Hughes to become obsessed with war and death. He developed a disinterestedness with the spirit of the then society and the world altogether.

However, He took immense interest in the animals and birds and the rural surroundings of the town of his birth, Mytholmroyd, in the West Riding region of Yorkshire. This interest in animals, dating from his early childhood remained with him throughout his life and this accounts for the large number of animal poems which he subsequently brought into light. Herein lays his preference for the simple, near-to-nature, primitive and uncorrupted life of the animal world to the complex and dehumanized world of the warring and vicious nations. Ted Hughes, thus embarks upon the primitive world of animals for the search of an identity and true culture which seems to lack in the human world.

Chapter I : Interest in Primitivism and a Concern for Culture:

Ted Hughes seems to have rejected much of the Western culture on the ground that the consciousness fostered by this culture relies on a dangerously narrow base. Ted Hughes is interested in the primeval instincts of the wild animals where the so called sophisticated modern Western culture is barbaric in their rationalistic and materialistic mode of life. Ted Hughes portrays the inner consciousness, identity and the natural world in his poetry. Ted Hughes has presented the primordial natural world which is outside the boundaries of the rational and intellectual adaptations as taken up by the anthropocentric world with the technical innovations with its multifaceted layers of significances. There are portrayals of animals, birds and landscapes with their primitive energies, the energy of wild animals which restores the rightful place of these animals in the universe. They are true to their instincts and keep up their allotted place in the universe. This instinct is represented by the energies of the depicted animals in Ted Hughes' poems. Ted Hughes regards this energy as the elemental energy which is the elemental power circuit of the universe. Human beings seem to have broken up from this chain of the elemental power circuit. He has lost his link with the universe because of the influence of modern culture with its emphasis on materialism and rationalism and with its denial of the instincts. Ted Hughes' vehement portrayal of the fierce animal energy in his poems is perhaps to make his readers conscious of the energy which used to exist in human beings but which they have now lost because of the enervating

influences of modern culture. Thus, Ted Hughes seems to look back at this primitive culture so that the consciousness among human being is grown and there is a return to the instincts which they have been ignoring at the cost of material pursuits. The returning to the natural instincts of human beings seems to be a returning to the true culture. The fierce energy of the animals in the volume "Lupercal" exhibits the above consciousness. Poems in the volume like Thrushes, Pike, An Otter, Hawk Roosting, Esther's Tomcat exhibit the instinctive, primitive energies akin to the nature of the respective creatures which are latent in human beings. Pagan religion and primitive myths are also celebrated in Ted Hughes' poems.

Chapter II: Adaptability and Single-mindedness of Ted Hughes' Animals as Opposed to Human beings:

Poems like The Hawk in the Rain, The Thought Fox, The Jaguar in the volume, named, "The Hawk in the Rain" bring out the fact that the animals are much more adaptable to nature than human beings in spite of the latter's intellectual superiority. In the first poem of the volume, The Hawk in the Rain, name after it, the hawk sits effortlessly at a high point, maintaining his equilibrium while the speaker says that he is walking laboriously on the ground because there is deep mud through which he has to drag himself and that the heavy rain is causing him much disadvantage. The hawk has adapted himself to the elemental forces and therefore can perch at a height, and look downwards calmly without any sign of discomfort. Ted Hughes's animals seem to conform to the Darwinian dictum of the survival of the fittest. But it is worthy of notice that in the Darwinian world the death is natural, and not brought about by any artificial mode of disaster. There is a celebration of the natural energies of the universe. The poem, The Thought Fox, is a different kind of poem which represents the poetic composition in the form of the instinctual movement of the fox. It is very striking to note that Ted Hughes conceives of such an idea of painting even his process of poetic creation by the representation of the wily movement of a fox.. It is worthy of notice that Ted Hughes compares his creative process with the movement of the animal which almost eludes any easy capture. The fox, an embodiment of primeval instincts, is thus, in the words of Keith Sagar, a symbol of "unquenchable life whether in the natural world or in the human psyche" ("Hughes and His Landscape" 8).

In the poem The Jaguar , the jaguar is depicted as a fierce beast who remains absolutely unaffected by his imprisonment in a cage. This jaguar is not at all affected by his imprisonment. The jaguar defies the artificiality of the cage and dwells with all his wilderness and vitality inherent in his nature.

In the volume, "Lupercal", the poems like Thrushes, Hawk Roosting, Pike, November and others also show the adaptability and single-mindedness of the animals as opposed to the human beings. What Ted Hughes admires most about the hawk and all the predators is their ability to administer absolute authority over their surroundings. He does not allow things to change. At a deeper level, the hawk becomes a mouthpiece of nature itself. Human beings are often assaulted by doubts and uncertainties while the hawk remains firm till the last. He is totally devoid of man's devitalizing intellectuality, inherent infirmity and slavish obedience to rules. This steadiness, firmness and single-mindedness of the hawk are explicitly missing in human beings.

Chapter III: Expulsion of the Ego and Self-hood

Ted Hughes seems to believe that expulsion of ego and self-hood is necessary for true culture and identity. By the presentation of his poems, Ted Hughes perhaps wants to drive out the ego or self-hood from the consciousness of man. Ted Hughes has employed dream-like

quality, meditation, shamanism, transpersonal psychology and other devices in his poems to reveal the unconscious mind. It is only by projecting the unconscious mind that the revelation and enlightment can be brought in the human mind. Ted Hughes has invested dreamlike quality in his poems, The Hawk in the Rain, The Thought Fox, The Horses, Hawk Roosting, The Bear, Relic, out, Second Glance at a Jaguar, Pibroch, Wodwo, A Childish Prank and others.

Chapter IV: Subversion of the Bible

Ted Hughes has rejected much of the Western culture on the ground that the consciousness fostered by this culture relies on a dangerously narrow base. His poetry seems to have a healing power by virtue of emphasis on the value of ancient myths and the primitive modes of life. Man is held back too much by his rationality and by the arbitrary taboos imposed by him on himself. Ted Hughes has thus presented the violent animal energy which can channelize the elemental energy of the universe. There is an utter need for equilibrium of the human psyche. For this reason Ted Hughes perhaps wants to bring about a change in the cultural foundations of the western man. Ted Hughes thus longs for the primitive culture with all its vitality and instinctive energy to replace the worn-out culture of Christianity. Ted Hughes thus, subverses the Biblical myths and creates a new myth of his own.

Chapter V: Representation of the Female in the volume "Gaudete" :

Ted Hughes's *Gaudete* is a poem laying bare the neurosis at the heart of our western civilisation. *Gaudete* remains Ted Hughes's poetic quest in trying to bring about a renovation of women and therefore of life in general. In it, Hughes creates a myth about the nature of civilisation itself, about the forces that shape humanity and the malignity that can transform us. Although in his work Hughes generally eschews the dualism that is at the core of Christian thought, there is nonetheless a dualism at play here – not good and evil, God and devil, but order and nature, rationality and spirit. In *Gaudete*, he depicts what he considers to be the spiritual impoverishment of contemporary civilisation. What he sees as the overweening attraction to pure reason, at the expense of mythic invention, leaves us prone to psychic discontent, paralysed, passive and apathetic. The collection shows Hughes's concern that Christianity has taught human beings that the earth is here for our consumption and argues that women only just escaped the same fate. In *Gaudete* there is a cyclical narrative that occurs in the hallucinatory sequences of Lumb finding a badly hurt woman whom he is unable to save. Thus Lumb's mission to resurrect the woman, the Great Mother on the earth ends in total failure. This seems to suggest the ultimatum if no change is brought up to bring back the naturalness in human civilization.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

The poet seems to long for some meaningful negotiation with the prehistoric world where the naturalness, spontaneity and authenticity of life are as smooth and intact as in the bright images of his portrayed creatures in his works. Through his poetry he seems to view human civilization into a new light which they have been ignoring. Ekbert Faas observes, Ted Hughes himself said that "Poetry was to drag into the clean nakedness of the light" (182). Ted Hughes's poetry, in these diverse ways seem to bring back human civilization to the happy state as before the devastations of the two world wars brought into. The poetry of Ted Hughes in this way, represents a challenge to urbanized, de-natured society and culture. Itseeks to reconnect the natural energies of man with those at work in the external natural world. Thus Ted Hughes's poems seem to delve deeper within darkness in the lost glories of human beings to rescue them from the crisis in modern civilization.

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